Five traits of effective ICS digital leadership

In delivering our Digital ICS programme we've been working closely with systems across the country. While ICSs (integrated care systems) are different in their makeup and the areas they serve are diverse, in our conversations with ICS leaders we've seen five common traits of effective digital leadership at system level. Leaders in all roles who display these characteristics are more likely to be creating the right conditions for successful digital transformation.

1

They understand that digital underpins the delivery of services

While health and care services are about people, they are **fundamentally powered by digital**. Getting the basics in place and continually investing in keeping these up to date and safe is what will enable you to deliver services across your system that meet patients' and clinicians' needs. This includes empowering patients to be active in their care where and when possible, clinical decision making powered by effective data sharing and a deep understanding of your population's need, which helps you to prioritise preventative care. We can't fix problems that we can't see – digital is fundamental to giving us the bigger picture of what's happening in the system, so that you can identify which priorities your system should tackle first.

> *The integrated care board's (ICB's) ability to drive what they need to in the future will be measured by the board's ability to engage with digital improvement and innovation. The chair needs to make sure that the digital conversation stays alive at board.*
> *No matter what agenda item the board is discussing, chairs must try to find a way to make sure digital is integrated into every part of the agenda. It has to be an area of personal interest for the chair. Chairs must seek to be informed enough to advocate – and know enough to have the conversation.*

SUE SYMINGTON, CHAIR,
HUMBER AND NORTH YORKSHIRE INTEGRATED CARE BOARD

3

They are comfortable with uncertainty

System change is messy and unpredictable. **There's no simple plan or journey**. Performance management against metrics is only one tool in the box, and ICS boards who rely too heavily on this tool miss out on the opportunities that arise naturally as things change. There are a range of hard and soft levers that ICB leaders can deploy. Taking time to collectively hone and then apply those levers across the system to shape and guide it in the right direction will help create the right conditions for successful digital transformation.

2

They can create consensus and build momentum

ICSs move at the pace of trust. Focusing on building relationships and trust is key to delivering against your digital agenda. Collaboration on resources, systems and shared data only happens where trust is high. The role of all ICS leaders is to actively create these conditions. This is an ongoing process and the effort needed shouldn't be underestimated – relationships have to be built and rebuilt as people are recruited, move roles or leave.

Our role is to create a clear understanding across all system partners that while digital is a key enabler to transformation, improvement, efficiency and safety, any digital change is only as successful as the people who make the change a reality. Human factors and a common purpose are the crucial elements that will make a success or failure of any technology in almost every case.

JIM AUSTIN,
CHIEF DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGY OFFICER,
JOINED UP CARE DERBYSHIRE

Followership and leadership are two key skills. As digital leaders, with experience of technical change delivery, our first task is to build trust. Leadership then starts with building a compelling case for change, responding to the problems and issues that colleagues face.

BEVERLEY BRYANT,
CHIEF DIGITAL INFORMATION OFFICER,
SOUTH EAST LONDON INTEGRATED CARE BOARD

5

They give people and organisations space to deliver and be creative

At ICB level, delivery is most often through others, so leaders must **leverage their position as enablers**. ICSs who are making the most progress have a strong emphasis on consensus and collaboration to meet the needs of patients and staff, over the needs of organisations. They're setting the strategic direction and then empowering the system to deliver, rather than defining the solutions. This includes recognising what 'risky bets' need to be made, and which don't.

These leaders understand the value of empowered multidisciplinary teams, operating together regardless of organisational boundaries, and focusing on a problem to solve.

4

They are able to inspire and motivate people on the digital agenda

Successful ICS leaders, whatever their role, are able to give a **clear and compelling narrative** for how services will be better, both for the population and for all those working in the system to deliver, because of investment in data and technology. Rather than a focus on implementing software and systems, an effective board conversation is about the strategic design of services, underpinned by technology and data.

As the ICS chief medical officer, the most impactful thing I can do to unblock the barriers my system faces when advancing digital is to keep talking about the difference it will make to patients and clinicians. Communicating a vision for patients and clinicians that's focused on their needs and empowered by access to digital care and care records is crucial.

KATE LANGFORD,
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER,
KENT AND MEDWAY INTEGRATED CARE BOARD

A good non-executive director will play an important role in this space. Our role generally is to support, yet be a critical friend, to challenge, to ensure strategic focus and clear goals and timelines, to get assurance that the appropriate governance is in place, and to hold to account when progress is not achieved.

ANITA DAY,
NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
LINCOLNSHIRE INTEGRATED CARE BOARD

Our offer

The Digital ICS programme is a free and voluntary offer for system leaders, thanks to funding from NHS England as part of their Digital Academy programmes. It is delivered in partnership with NHS Confederation and Public Digital, a consultancy that has experience of working with over 30 governments, global businesses, and multilateral organisations on digital transformation.

It builds on the learning from the NHS Providers' Digital Boards programme which has engaged over 1,800 board members from 200 NHS trusts, including delivery of over 100 trust board development sessions.

The programme is available to all members of NHS Confederation's ICS Network, and works closely with existing ICS forums to capture and share board level good practice and learning on digital transformation. It also offers free and bespoke leadership development sessions, designed to build consensus among the board and equip leaders with a clear understanding of the conditions needed for successful digital transformation across systems.

To find out more please contact us at
digital.ics@nhsproviders.org

> *The team took the time to understand the unique needs and context of our ICB. They challenged us to consider what role we as a board will play in making digital a success across our system.*
>
> SHANE DEVLIN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, BRISTOL, NORTH SOMERSET AND SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE INTEGRATED CARE BOARD

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